

Plymstock School

Church Road, Plymstock, Plymouth. PL9 9AZ.

Inspection dates 23–24 April 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The relentless drive and outstanding effectiveness of leaders at all levels, including the governing body, have meant that the school has made rapid improvements in achievement and in the quality of teaching since it opened as an academy.
- Good teaching supports good achievement across a wide range of subjects. Some teaching is of high quality and this leads to outstanding achievement in some areas over time, notably in English and mathematics.
- As a result of the school's success in core subjects, every student who left in 2012 gained either a place in further education or started in employment.
- Students make good progress from their starting points and achieve well. After a dip in 2012, progress is now accelerating rapidly.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Students achieve extremely well due to highly effective provision and care.
- Students who attend the unit for those with autistic spectrum disorder achieve particularly well. It is led outstandingly well and the students receive excellent teaching and care.
- Students behave outstandingly well and display excellent attitudes to their learning.
- The school's promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong.
- A wide range of curricular and extra-curricular experiences are offered to students who embrace them with enthusiasm.
- Students and their parents say how well the school addresses their safety. This is due to excellent care and exemplary safeguarding procedures.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is providing the highest levels of challenge to students of all abilities. As a result, students make good, but not outstanding, progress.
- Students do not have enough opportunities to work actively or by themselves in lessons.
- The best practice, which is leading to rapid progress, is not being employed as well in all subjects in the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 43 lessons, 15 of which were jointly observed with senior leaders.
- They made shorter visits to lessons to look at how well teachers mark students' work and to examine the quality of literacy teaching across the curriculum. The headteacher joined this activity.
- Two inspectors visited the school's unit for students with autistic spectrum disorder, visiting four lessons. Discussions were held with the acting special educational needs coordinator in her role as leader of the unit.
- Inspectors held discussions with senior leaders, staff, a local authority representative, the teacher in charge of 'HMS Heroes' and three governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body.
- They considered the views of parents (148 views from the on-line questionnaire, Parent View, and one letter) and also the views of 23 staff through a staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors talked to students in lessons, around the school and through more formal meetings with students from Years 7, 8, 11 and 12.
- They looked at key documents including the school's own self-evaluation, assessment data used to monitor students' standards, records of the school's monitoring of the quality of teaching, attendance and behaviour records, safeguarding documents and minutes of governors' meetings.
- Information about teachers' professional development was also examined.

Inspection team

Paul Garvey, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Marian Marks	Additional inspector
Patrick Hazlewood	Additional inspector
Justine Hocking	Additional inspector
Terry Payne	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Plymstock School is a larger-than-average secondary school. It converted to become an academy school on 1 April 2011. When its predecessor school, of the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be outstanding.
- It has specially resourced provision for 18 students with special educational needs with autistic spectrum disorder. This is housed in a separate unit on the school site and is managed by the school. Many of the students also attend lessons in main school. Some other students with autistic spectrum disorder spend varying amounts of time in the unit.
- The proportions of students with disabilities and special educational needs who are supported through school action, at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are all close to average. Students with autistic spectrum disorder make up the greatest proportion of students who have a statement of special educational needs.
- Most students are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of students who are eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for children in the care of the local authority, for students known to be eligible for free school meals and students whose parents serve in the armed forces) is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- No early entry for GCSE examinations takes place in any subject.
- A small number of students attends off-site provision at a range of different providers.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching from good to outstanding by:
 - ensuring that all lessons are fast paced, challenging and more tightly planned to meet the needs of students of all abilities
 - providing more opportunities for students to work actively and independently in lessons.
- Make sure that more students make rapid progress by sharing the excellent practice, employed in the best subjects, more widely across the school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students achieve well. The ability on entry of students varies widely, from above average in the current Year 11 to below average in Years 7 and 8. Although progress for Year 11 students was slower than expected in 2012, the present Year 11 cohort is progressing rapidly and this is also seen in Years 7 to 10. Students' progress is most rapid in English.
- Despite their excellent attitudes to learning, students have not made more rapid progress in many subjects because the teaching does not challenge them sufficiently well.
- The school's systems for checking students' progress are thorough and accurate. In the current academic year, slower progress in some subjects has been robustly tackled through setting students more challenging targets. This is helping to speed up their progress.
- Attainment is highest in English and in mathematics. Attainment is notably higher in the current Year 11 than it was at the equivalent point last year.
- Achievement in the sixth form is outstanding. Students make rapid progress over time. Attainment at the end of Year 13 is high. This is because students respond very well to the school's high expectations.
- The progress of students in the school's unit for those with autistic spectrum disorder is rapid, due to the care and high quality of teaching that they receive.
- Other students who have special educational needs progress at similar rates to their peers because of the good teaching they receive.
- Students with weaker skills in reading are very effectively supported to improve and the school uses the Year 7 catch-up funding particularly well. Literacy is also promoted well in other subjects, which helps to support the high levels of achievement in English.
- The pupil premium is used well. Consultation with parents has informed how additional funding to support pupil premium students is used. A house mentoring system and an Easter school have been established and a range of educational visits have taken place, all of which have also benefited other students. As a result, the gap between the attainment of eligible students and their peers in the current year has halved in English and has reduced to close to that of their peers in mathematics.

The quality of teaching is good

- In many lessons, including in the sixth form, the teaching is fast paced and a great deal is expected of the students. When presented with such high expectations, students always respond very well and progress is rapid.
- In all lessons positive relationships between students and teachers were observed. However, in some lessons, students were not challenged enough. This led to good, rather than outstanding, learning taking place.
- In an outstanding English lesson, the students studying *Of Mice and Men* were given the opportunity to gather information from the text. The teacher systematically checked progress and, through searching questions, students were able to reflect on a mistreated character, challenging their moral and spiritual viewpoints. Careful planning meant that the lesson was pitched at the right level for all students and, consequently, they all progressed extremely well.
- In many subjects, students continue their learning in after-school, 'twilight' classes. A group of GCSE dance students were observed diligently honing the quality of their dance routine for a performance to parents that evening.
- Where teaching does not allow students high levels of independence, and teachers talk for too long, students are less actively involved in learning, less is expected of individuals and thus progress is not outstanding. The best practice is not routinely shared between departments, meaning that there are missed opportunities for teachers to learn from their colleagues who

teach other subjects.

- Students are clear about their individual targets and marking and assessment almost always give them clear information about next steps in their learning. However, the best practice is not happening in all departments. Where marking is outstanding, for example in English and in science, comments from students are encouraged and their response is useful to both students and teachers in agreeing how they will take learning on to the next stage.
- Most lessons have a clear literacy focus and the excellent promotion of literacy across the curriculum is supporting outstanding achievement in English at both GCSE and A level. Students are not encouraged to apply their numeracy skills so effectively in other subjects.
- Teaching in the school's unit for students with autistic spectrum disorder is very effective. Students were actively involved in all four lessons visited. In one lesson, a Year 11 student, doing a controlled assessment in English, explained how well he was doing against his targets, across a range of subjects. He attributed this to the excellent teaching and support he has received during his time at the school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

Are outstanding

- The attitude of students to their studies is excellent and students of all ages show pride in their school. As a result, they behave outstandingly well.
- Students strive to meet the very high levels of expectation from their teachers, but even when expectations are lower, students very rarely misbehave.
- Students are knowledgeable about different forms of bullying, such as cyber bullying. The establishment of a 'kidscape' group in the school has supported this. Students of all years said that bullying was rare and behaviour was excellent. As a result, both students and their parents, through Parent View, say that students are kept extremely safe at school.
- The successful management of behaviour has contributed greatly to the calm and purposeful atmosphere around the school. The use of safe areas where students can talk to staff, and easy to remember phrases, such as 'Keep calm and go to the hub!' (where heads of the school house system can be found), help students to take responsibility for their own behaviour and safety.
- There is a communal and supportive atmosphere in which students have the opportunity to thrive.
- Attendance has improved over recent years to average and this improvement has continued in the current year.
- When challenging behaviour incidents occur in the autistic spectrum disorder unit, staff do not use restraint techniques but instead manage behaviour by defusing the situation. When inspectors visited, behaviour was excellent and all students were extremely well engaged.

The leadership and management

are outstanding

- Leadership and management at all levels in the school, including the sixth form, have brought about significant improvements so that a number of areas of the school's work are outstanding. As a result of these improvements, the school is in a very strong position to improve further.
- Improved tracking systems and the use of more challenging targets have led to rapid progress in all year groups. The monitoring of teaching and learning has improved over the last two years and an increasing proportion of outstanding lessons is being taught.
- Leaders set clear targets for staff development. This is supported by a comprehensive programme of training. In consequence, leaders in charge of subjects and other aspects of the school's work say that they feel very well supported.
- The curriculum provides ample opportunity for students to achieve well. Strengths in the core subjects of English and mathematics equip students well for the world of work. In addition, a wide range of curricular enhancement, including a wealth of sporting opportunities, provided

through the school's specialist sports college status, produces well-rounded and confident individuals.

- Safeguarding arrangements are exemplary and are a crucial element in students and their parents saying how safe the school is. The very high priority given to safeguarding leads to every member of staff, at all levels, being asked searching safeguarding questions by governors at interview. The attendance and safety of the small number of students educated off-site are monitored closely and, as a result, they make good progress.
 - Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education are all promoted strongly. Events such as Holocaust Memorial Day allow all Year 9 students to reflect upon the horrors of the past and Year 13 students learn about a range of cultures, from present-day Goths to the plight of children in Romanian orphanages.
 - The particular pastoral needs of students from families who have one or more parents in the armed forces are extremely well supported through 'HMS Heroes'. The care given, not just service students but also their family and friends, is exemplary. As a result, their academic progress is more rapid than their peers.
 - The school has many partnerships with other schools and providers. It uses these partnerships well to boost students' performance. In addition, leaders have sought out sources of funding wisely and, together with the governing body, exercise excellent control over finances.
 - The local authority works effectively with the school, providing light touch support.
 - The school works hard to see that all students have equal opportunities. There is no discrimination. Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are very well cared for, not least those in the autistic spectrum disorder unit, where leaders make sure that provision is outstanding.
 - The promotion of literacy across the school is at the heart of school improvement and this has resulted in outstanding English results in recent years. A before-school handwriting club, together with many opportunities for students to apply their skills across the curriculum, has helped many weaker readers and writers to gain qualifications well beyond those that may have been expected of them when they joined the school.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are fully involved in evaluating the school's work and monitoring leaders' progress in tackling priorities for improvement. They have a good understanding of students' progress and attainment data and a clear awareness of the school's performance in comparison with that in other schools. The governing body understands the quality of teaching across the school. The governors have accompanied senior staff on learning walks and in lesson observations. They are involved in discussions on staff performance, being keen to reward excellence in teaching while making sure that pay progression is not automatic. They know what the school is doing to tackle any cases of underperformance. They understand the importance of providing challenge as well as support. Governors oversee the school's spending of the pupil premium funding and monitor its impact on achievement and they manage the school budget well.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	136568
Local authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	412133

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,540
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	287
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sandie Woodford
Headteacher	David Farmer
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01752 402679
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